# Standards-Based Grading

Getting More Students
to Complete
More Rigorous Assignments and Assessments
at Higher Levels

# Handout

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# Aligning Grading Practices with Standards

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**What Do Letter/Number Grades Mean Versus What Should Letter/Number Grades Mean?**

**The Controversy:** Most educators and non-educators assume that grades and grade point averages are precise indicators of what students know and can do in a subject area. Yet there is still little agreement as to the exact meaning of letter grades. National surveys show great discrepancies between how teachers determine letter grades. Although all teachers seem to include what students know in the subject, elements such as effort, behavior, and attendance are also considered and weighted differently. Grades given by one teacher might mean something entirely different from grades given by another teacher, even though the teachers preside over two identical classes with identical students who are assigned identical work. For example, one teacher might count effort and cooperation as 25% of the grade; another teacher might not count these variables at all.

## Issues for Discussion
**What elements do grades stress?  How are these elements weighted in determining a grade?**

- Academic Performance
    - Tests, Quizzes, Exams
    - Projects
    - Performance Assessments
    - Homework
- Effort
- Behavior
- Attendance
- Cooperation/Attitude
- Compliant

**Reflect:**
- What are the most important elements determining a grade? The least important?
- Are there multiple ways students can "show what they know?" Are these methods appropriate for the standards for the course?
- Is there a final exam? Is it comprehensive?
- Do the elements used in determining a grade give a complete picture of whether or not students have mastered the content of the course?
- What would be the impact of a policy allowing students to redo work until it met a certain standard of quality?
- To what extent should a grade for the course reflect elements other than students' knowledge of course content (behavior, attendance, attitude)?
- Should certain elements used in determining grades be consistent across courses in a school? If so, which elements?
- Should the weight of these elements in determining grades be consistent across courses?  Why or why not?
- How should we communicate to students what it takes to earn an "A" or a "B?"
- How are summative and formative tests used?  What part should each have in determining a grade?
- Can grades be valid or reliable if everyone has a different system? How do parents and students know what an "A" is?

- Could it be possible that grades are another way to sort kids? Is this done so that parents and teachers can compare one child to another: "my child is an "A" student, what is yours?"
- What do grades mean? What is an "A"? A Percentage of correct answers?
- What information do grades give to teachers and parents? What do you know about the "B" student who comes into your room the first day of school? Did they know their content? Did they show good effort?
- Are grades necessary? If not, what could we do? If so, why?

## Providing Students with More Than One Opportunity to Meet High Standards

Although most districts throughout the country have developed or adopted a series of standards and benchmarks for most courses, teachers have not been trained to move those standards into the classroom in any way other than curriculum. Standards-based education involves establishing content standards and benchmarks, but it also involves standards-based teaching and learning.

In order to have true standards-based teaching and learning, the key is for ***all students to meet these standards at the proficient level.*** Schools have adopted the content standards, but not the teaching and learning standards.

When schools are completely standards-based, with content, process and learning standards, systems have to be put into place that not only measure how well students perform on the standard, but must also offer opportunities for students who actually perform below the standard to have extra help and time to redo assignments to get them to reach the standards. Although this may seem impossible in some teachers' eyes, most schools can do a much better job than they are currently doing to assure that almost all students reach this level.

## Creating a School Where Failure Is Not an Option

Turn your school into one where ***<u>Failure is Not an Option!</u>***

Schools must develop teaching and grading strategies and extra help programs that provide opportunities for revising or re-doing work to meet content standards. Schools must also begin to examine their goals and priorities concerning teaching and learning to standards. Schools can do this by redefining high expectations as meeting grade-level standards at the proficient or advanced level. Schools must also embrace the idea that

### Zeros Aren't Possible!

Schools have to create a culture of high expectations where teachers are confident and supported when they tell students that there are "No excuses!" and that they "…don't get to choose not to work."

This practice will work to improve the **quality** of ***all*** student work when implemented with fidelity.

# Beliefs at the Heart of High Expectations for All Students

| Effort-based Approach to Student Achievement | Ability-based Approach to Student Achievement |
|---|---|
| Effort makes a difference. Academic ability can be grown. It is not how smart the child is, but how hard he or she works that determines success. All students are held to high expectations and offered opportunities to take challenging courses. | Students of high ability receive the highest marks and are selected to take the most challenging courses. Students perceived with less ability are put in classes with lower expectations. Any academic deficiencies students have are attributed to low ability. |
| Students learn at different rates and may not reach proficiency at the same time. A mistake is not an inability to perform, but a learning opportunity. For that reason, students may re-do work and retake tests. | Since time is the constant in learning, students that fail to finish assignments, score well on tests, or learn key concepts by the "due dates" receive failing marks with no second chances. |
| Effort-based teachers are not necessarily unrealistic about their students' capabilities, but they are unwilling to give up on them. Students are provided with extra help—during school, in the summer, and before- and after-school. | Extra help opportunities are entirely the responsibility of the student. If they take advantage of them, that's good; but no structure exists to ensure that students who need extra help get it. |
| Students can be motivated to come to the belief that their effort is worthwhile, even if they do not believe it at the time they enter school. | Students have the responsibility to motivate themselves to learn. If they do not believe they can do well in school, they probably won't. |
| Students are provided with extensive and specific feedback through the learning process to make corrections in their understanding and continue to learn. | Feedback to students is limited, often occurring only in the form of a numerical or letter grade. |
| Teachers explicitly teach students how to exert effective efforts in learning—study skills, time management, problem solving, and note-taking. | Teachers assume that students should have these skills by the time they get to high school. |

# Believing in Effort: Rising to High Expectations

Look At the following benchmarks and see where your school as a whole scores on each indicator below.

## 1. The school has a clear alignment of standards.
- *A defined set of standards drives all instruction and assessment.*
- *Courses are aligned horizontally and vertically across course*
- *sections that are the same.*
- *Common unit planning and/or pacing guides are developed.*
- *Common assignments and assessments are in place.*
- *Common rubrics have been developed.*
- *Quality student work that meets high standards is posted.*
- *Common course syllabi and end-of-course exams have been developed.*

## 2. Evidence of proficiency is evident in all assignments and assessments
- *Assignments are broad in scope.*
- *All student work is accomplished at the proficient or advanced level.*
- *Assigned homework is meaningful*
- *There is a building-wide Literacy Plan in place.*
- *Assignments are aligned with numeracy goals.*

## 3. Quality work expectation
- *Guidelines for quality work are provided for each assignment.*
- *Students are required to re-do work until it meets the standard.*
- *Students are required to revise their essays to improve quality.*
- *Teachers clearly indicated what is necessary to earn an A or B.*
- *There is regular communication with parents/or home on student progress.*

## 4. Interventions and opportunities for extra help
- *Students are aware of when, where and how extra help can be obtained.*
- *Interventions are in place when student's grades fall below a C.*
- *School has a re-do plan in place*

# Self -Assessment: Where Are You in Developing Standards-based Grading?

**Directions:** Rate your school's present practice on each of the following descriptors using the scale below. From your responses, analyze where you are in implementing standards-based grading school wide.

1       We have not yet addressed this area.
2       We are making our "first steps" in this area.
3       We are somewhat "there." We have some successes, but some struggles as well.
4       We have general success in this area, but we still need to do some "tweaking" to get where we want to be.
5       We are there! This is strength for us and we are prepared to share our "best practice" with others.

## Step A—Awareness of Our Present Grade Data
We regularly examine our grade data and failure rates, are aware of our range among different sections of courses, and have analyzed reasons why failures occur.

1               2               3               4               5

## Step B—Awareness of How We Presently Assign Grades
We have shared how we determine term grades, allowing each teacher to describe their methods. We have identified our similarities and differences in grading practices.

1               2               3               4               5

## Step C—A Shared Understanding of Standards-based Grades and What They Mean
We have embraced the concept of standards-based grading and have collaborated on the quality of work necessary to earn an A, B, C, etc.

1               2               3               4               5

## Step D—Common Grading Practices
Working with teachers who teach the same course, we have collaborated on a common grading practice that includes:

The purpose of our grading and what we will grade

1               2               3               4               5

The worth of each assignment or assessment in the total grade

1               2               3               4               5

How we will compute a term grade from the assignment/assessment data

1               2               3               4               5

**Step E—Classroom Practices to Increase Students Meeting Standards**
We have collaborated on classroom practices to get students meeting standards and discussed how these
will impact the process of assigning grades:

The use of incompletes for missing or sub-standard work

1               2               3               4               5

The elimination of zeros as a punishment for not doing work

1               2               3               4               5

Opportunities to re-do work to meet standards without penalties to the grade

1               2               3               4               5

**Step F—Consistent Scoring of Student Work**
We have collaborated on grading common assignments and assessments to ensure consistency in
applying grade criteria.

The use of incompletes for missing or sub-standard work

1               2               3               4               5

The elimination of zeros as a punishment for not doing work

1               2               3               4               5

Opportunities to re-do work to meet standards without penalties to the grade

1               2               3               4               5

**Step G—Reporting Student Progress**
We are discussing steps to align our methods for reporting grades with standards, such as
developing ways to record assignment and assessment data in relation to standards and organizing grade
reports to better communicate student progress in relation to the standards.

1               2               3               4               5

**Step H—Does the course engage students in a variety of intellectually challenging work that
will get students to proficiency with regard to the standards for the course?**

1. Are the assignments and assessments sufficient evidence for determining whether students have met
ALL the standards for the course? If there is insufficient work required for a particular
standard, what would you suggest adding?

2.  Do the projects, assignments, and assessments described ask students to produce work at the proficient or advanced level (to apply, synthesize, analyze, and/or evaluate concepts, skills, and information)? Cite evidence of the levels present.

3.  Are students required to work on an extended major project that lasts a week or more at least once a semester? (*MMGW* Assessment data shows that students who say they are required to do a major project in every class score higher in reading, mathematics and science.)

4.  Is meaningful homework assigned? (*MMGW* Assessment data shows that students who are assigned and do at least one hour of homework a night across all subjects score higher in reading, mathematics, and science.)

5.  Do the assignments and assessments support school-wide literacy goals?
    - Is at least one short writing assignment given weekly? How?
    - Are students required to complete a research paper?
    - How do the assignments contribute to helping students read 25 or more books—or their equivalent—across all classes each year?

6.  Do the assignments and assessments support school-wide numeracy goals?

7. Are other criteria met as established by school-wide standards for quality, such as . . .

# Setting Up Policies for Re-doing Work

## Re-doing Work: The Research
- Asking students to redo, polish and perfect their work is part of successful classrooms, particularly in schools of high-minority, high-poverty. (Haberman, Martin, *The Pedagogy of Poverty vs. Good Teaching)*
- Re-doing a few pieces of written work several times results in greater learning than writing many pieces that are graded once each. (The National Writing Project, SREB: *HSTW/MMGW* Assessment Findings)
- Providing specific information about learning in terms of particular objectives increases achievement. (Hattie, Marzano)
- Using feedback is the single most powerful innovation to enhance student achievement. (Davies)
- Instilling a sense of persistence in struggling students can replace hopelessness. (Absolum, Reeves)

## Talking about re-doing work raises major concerns . . .
- What if my approach to re-doing work is all wrong?
- What if I disagree with my colleagues about re-doing work? What if my colleagues don't like they way I have students re-do work?
- What if the principal or department chair makes me do something with re-doing work that I don't want to do?
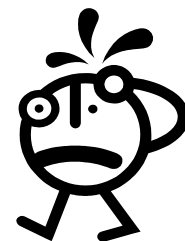
## Steps for Engaging Teachers in Setting Up Re-Do Policies

Improving student achievement means that we often have to motivate colleagues to consider new ideas and perhaps even do something they are originally against doing. Their hesitation can be based on ignorance, fear, distrust, worries about an increased workload, or complacency. The following steps help focus teachers on clear goals and get them thinking about building on their successes to take action that will improve all students' learning.

1. **Begin with data.** Are your course failure rates high? Are students performing poorly on state or standardized tests because they are not reaching proficiency? Be clear about the **need** for redo opportunities.

2. **Share what is already being done with re-doing work**. Individually, teachers may already be using re-do opportunities. Discuss the circumstances under which teachers have students re-do work and the number of students taking advantage of those opportunities. Note the impact of those teachers' redo practices on their failure rates.

3. **Choose one or two re-do practices to "pilot test" as an action research project within a content area or grade level team**. Set up the redo practice, collect data on how many students take advantage of the redo policies and how the re-doing of work affects students proficiency in the standards. Examine the data and analyze what went well with the redo practice(s) and what might be changed to improve it.

4. **Adopt a re-do practice in a content area or grade level team and implement it fully for a year**, examining how it affects failure rates and students performance on assessments.

# To Redo or Not to Redo:  That is the Question

## THE BIG IDEAS

1.  Most students fail courses not because they **CANNOT** do the work but because they **DO NOT** do the work. Teachers report that students not doing/completing work is the number one reason students fail in their classes.

2.  Giving zeroes to motivate students to complete their work is effective only for good students. It isn't motivating for other students.

3.  Students learn early (by middle school) that they do not have to turn in their assignments. If assignments are "hard" or if they require "too much effort," the easy out is to take the zero.

4.  Teachers prepare great activities to teach to proficiency and then students choose not to complete them. Why are we giving them the option?

5.  Teachers who expect more of **ALL** students get more from all students—and that includes **REQUIRING** that key assignments be done—and redone—to standards (using rubrics and exemplars).

6.  Teachers who expect more use their redo policies as ways to help students come to believe that they are "smart" and can do high-level work—the policies become positive ways for more students to succeed rather than punitive measures to "teach them" a lesson or two!

6.  Schools need an action plan for designing and implementing redo and second-chance policies. The plan should include a time for staff to study issues and come to some consensus about:
>   What work will require revision?
>   What rubrics and exemplars will be used for assessment?
>   What timeline will be used for accepting revised work?
>   What kind of scores can students earn on work that is revised to high
>       standards?

# II. What "A", "B" and "C" Looks Like According to NAEP

*School leaders will need to facilitate a whole faculty discussion designed to reach a common understanding of what A and B level work looks like and what students who earn A's and B's ought to be able to accomplish.*

| Grade Assigned to Student | A | B | C or Below |
|---|---|---|---|
| **NAEP LEVEL Student Is Able To Achieve** *National Assessment of Educational Progress* | **Proficient or Advanced** | **Basic** | **Below basic** |
| **Level Of Competency Student Is Able To Achieve** | ▪ Exceeds expectations for grade level<br>▪ Successfully answers questions or solves problems from Bloom's levels at application and above<br>▪ Meets expectations for Honors level<br>▪ Competent and able to complete college preparatory work<br>▪ Exceeds standard for the course as identified by state and local standards | ▪ At grade level<br>▪ Competent for grade level work<br>▪ Successfully answers questions or solves problems from Bloom's knowledge, comprehension and application<br>▪ Performs at standard for the course as identified by state and local standards | ▪ Below grade level<br>▪ Unable to complete grade level work<br>▪ Unable to answer many Bloom's knowledge and comprehension questions or solve problems requiring basic comprehension<br>▪ Unable to perform at standard for the course as identified by state and local standards |
| **Percentage Of Assessment/Assignment Objectives Student Is Able To Successfully Complete** | ▪ Able to successfully complete 90% of Bloom's knowledge, comprehension and application questions on teacher made tests<br>▪ Able to complete 90% of Bloom's analysis, synthesis and evaluation questions on teacher made tests | ▪ Able to complete 80% of Bloom's knowledge, comprehension and application questions on teacher made tests<br>▪ Able to complete 80% of Bloom's analysis, synthesis and evaluation questions on teacher made tests | ▪ Completes less than 80% of Bloom's knowledge, comprehension and application questions on teacher made tests<br>▪ Completes less than 80% of Bloom's analysis, synthesis and evaluation questions on teacher made tests |

# Assign ALL Students Rigorous Assignments and Assessments

| Proficiency Level | A question or assignment may be deemed at this level if: |
|---|---|
| **Basic** | ▪ Question cues, such as the following, are used: recall facts; make simple inferences or interpretations; and demonstrate a rudimentary understanding of terminology, principles, and concepts that underlie the field.<br>▪ It requires students to identify some parts of physical and biological systems.<br>▪ It requires students to recognize relationships presented in verbal, algebraic, tabular and graphic forms.<br>▪ It requires students to answer who, what, where and when types of questions.<br>**Simply stated, questions and assignments that require students to remember information and make simple explanations are at the Basic Level.** |

| BASIC | |
|---|---|
| **KNOWLEDGE** | **COMPREHENSION** |
| **REMEMBER** | **EXPLAIN** |
| **USEFUL VERBS** | **USEFUL VERBS** |
| tell      write<br>list      find<br>describe      state<br>relate      name<br>locate | explain      predict<br>interpret      restate<br>outline      translate<br>discuss      compare<br>distinguish      describe |
| **SAMPLE QUESTION STEMS FOR ASSESSMENTS** | **SAMPLE QUESTION STEMS FOR ASSESSMENTS** |
| What happened after…?<br>How many…?<br>Who was it that…?<br>Name the…?<br>Describe what happened at…<br>Who spoke to…?<br>Tell me why…?<br>Find the meaning of…?<br>What is it…?  Which is true or false…? | Write in your own words…?<br>Write a brief outline…<br>What do you think could have happened next…?<br>Who do you think…?<br>What was the main idea?<br>Who was the main character?<br>Distinguish between…?<br>What differences exist between…?<br>Provide an example of what you mean by…?<br>Provide a definition for…? |
| **POTENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS AND PRODUCTS** | **POTENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS AND PRODUCTS** |
| ▪ Make timeline of events.<br>▪ List the story's main events<br>▪ Make a facts chart.<br>▪ List any pieces of information you can remember.<br>▪ Recite a poem.<br>▪ List all the animals in the story.<br>▪ Make a chart showing…<br>▪ Remember an idea or fact<br>▪ Question and answer sessions<br>▪ Workbooks and worksheets<br>▪ Remember things read, heard, saw<br>▪ Information searches<br>▪ Reading Assignments<br>▪ Drill and practice<br>▪ Finding definitions | ▪ Memory games Quizzes<br>▪ Forming relationships (analogies, similes)<br>▪ Predicting effects of changes<br>▪ Dramatization<br>▪ Peer teaching Show and tell<br>▪ Estimating<br>▪ Story problems<br>▪ Cut out or draw pictures to show a particular event<br>▪ Illustrate the main idea.<br>▪ Make a cartoon strip showing the sequence of events.<br>▪ Write and perform a play based on the story.<br>▪ Retell the story in your own words.<br>▪ Paint a picture of some aspect of the story you like.<br>▪ Write a summary of the event.<br>▪ Prepare a flow chart to illustrate the sequence of events. |

# Assign ALL Students Rigorous Assignments and Assessments

| Proficiency Level | A question or assignment may be deemed at this level if: |
|---|---|
| **Proficient** | ▪ Question cues, such as the following, are used: use analytical skills, draw reasonable conclusions, or make appropriate conjectures or inferences by applying logical reasoning on the basis of partial or incomplete information.<br>▪ It requires student to defend ideas and to give supporting examples.<br>▪ It requires the understanding of algebraic, statistical and geometric and spatial reasoning that is relevant to the field.<br>▪ It requires algebraic operations involving polynomials; justifying geometric relationships.<br>▪ It requires the application of scientific and technical principles to everyday situations.<br>▪ It requires judging and defending the reasonableness of answers or solutions to problems that routinely occur in the real world or chosen technical field.<br><br>**Simply stated, Proficient Level questions and assignments require students to apply and analyze information learned.** |

| PROFICIENT | |
|---|---|
| **APPLICATION** | **ANALYSIS** |
| **APPLY** | **ANALYZE** |
| **USEFUL VERBS** | **USEFUL VERBS** |
| solve　　　　complete<br>show　　　　examine<br>use　　　　　classify<br>illustrate<br>calculate<br>construct | analyze　　　　categorize<br>distinguish　　　identify<br>examine　　　　explain<br>compare　　　　separate<br>contrast　　　　advertise<br>investigate |
| **SAMPLE QUESTION STEMS FOR ASSESSMENTS** | **SAMPLE QUESTION STEMS FOR ASSESSMENTS** |
| Do you know another instance where…?<br>Could this have happened in…?<br>Group by characteristics such as…?<br>What factors would change if?<br>Apply the method used to some experience of your own…?<br>What questions would you ask?<br>From the information given, develop a set of instructions about…?<br>Would this information be useful if you had a…? | Which event could not have happened if…?<br>If…happened, what might the ending have been?<br>How was this similar to…?<br>What was the underlying theme of…?<br>What do you see as other possible outcomes?<br>Why did changes occur?<br>What must have happened when…?<br>How is…similar to…?<br>What are some of the problems of…?<br>What was the problem with…? |
| **POTENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS AND PRODUCTS** | **POTENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS AND PRODUCTS** |
| ▪ Construct a model to demonstrate how it will work.<br>▪ Make a diorama to illustrate an important event.<br>▪ Compose a book about…<br>▪ Make a scrapbook about the areas of study.<br>▪ Make a paper-maché map showing information<br>▪ Make a puzzle game using ideas from the study area.<br>▪ Make a clay model of…<br>▪ Paint a mural.<br>▪ Design a market strategy for your product.<br>▪ Design an ethnic costume.<br>▪ Use knowledge from various areas to find solutions<br>▪ Role playing/role reversal<br>▪ Producing a newspaper, stories, etc.<br>▪ Interviews<br>▪ Experiments<br>▪ Solving problems by use of known information | ▪ Practical applications of learned knowledge<br>▪ Design a questionnaire to gather information.<br>▪ Make a flow chart to show critical stages.<br>▪ Write a commercial for a new / familiar product.<br>▪ Review a work of art in terms of form, color, and texture.<br>▪ Construct a graph to illustrate selected information.<br>▪ Uncover unique characteristics<br>▪ Distinguish between facts and inferences<br>▪ Evaluate the relevancy of data<br>▪ Recognize logical fallacies in reasoning<br>▪ Recognize unstated assumptions<br>▪ Analyze the structure of a work of art, music or writing<br>▪ Compare and contrast<br>▪ Construct a jigsaw puzzle.<br>▪ Analyze a family tree showing relationships. |

## Assign ALL Students Rigorous Assignments and Assessments

| Proficiency Level | A question or assignment may be deemed at this level if: |
|---|---|
| **Advanced** | ▪ It requires the formulation of generalizations, the synthesis of ideas and the creation of models through probing examples and counterexamples.<br>▪ It requires students to communicate their ideas and reasoning through the use of concepts, symbolism and logical thinking.<br>▪ It requires the design and application of procedures to test or solve complex, real-world problems.<br>▪ It requires written responses that are thorough, thoughtful and extensive.<br><br>**Simply stated, Advanced Level questions and assignments require students to evaluate and create work.** |

| ADVANCED | |
|---|---|
| SYNTHESIS | EVALUATIONS |
| CREATE | EVALUATE |

| USEFUL VERBS | | USEFUL VERBS | |
|---|---|---|---|
| create | design | judge | verify |
| invent | imagine | select | argue |
| compose | improve | choose | discuss |
| predict | propose | decide | determine |
| plan | devise | justify | Prioritize |
| construct | formulate | debate | |

| SAMPLE QUESTION STEMS FOR ASSESSMENTS | SAMPLE QUESTION STEMS FOR ASSESSMENTS |
|---|---|
| Design a…to…?<br>What is a possible solution to…?<br>What would happen if…?<br>If you had access to all resources, how would you deal with…?<br>How would you design your own way to…?<br>How many ways can you…?<br>Create new and unusual uses for?<br>Develop a proposal which would…?<br>How would you compose a song about…?<br>Write a new recipe for a tasty dish? | Is there a better solution to…?<br>Judge the value of…<br>Defend your position about…<br>Do you think…is a good or bad thing? Explain<br>How would you have handled…?<br>What changes to…would you recommend?<br>Are you a…person? Why?<br>How would you feel if…?<br>How effective are…? |

| POTENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS AND PRODUCTS | POTENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS AND PRODUCTS |
|---|---|
| ▪ Invent a machine to do a specific task.<br>▪ Design a building.<br>▪ Create a new product. Give it a name and plan a marketing campaign.<br>▪ Write your feelings in relation to…<br>▪ Write a TV show, play, puppet show, role-play, song, or pantomime about…<br>▪ Design a record, book, or magazine cover for…<br>▪ Create a language code.<br>▪ Sell an idea to a billionaire.<br>▪ Compose a rhythm or put new words to a known melody.<br>▪ Hypothesize<br>▪ Write a creative story, poem or song<br>▪ Propose a plan for an experiment<br>▪ Integrate the learning from different areas into a plan for solving a problem | ▪ Formulate the new scheme for classifying objects<br>▪ Show how an idea or product might be changed<br>▪ Prepare a list of criteria to judge a…show.<br>▪ Conduct a debate about an area of special interest.<br>▪ Make a booklet about 5 rules you value.<br>▪ Make judgments about data or ideas based on either internal or external conditions or criteria<br>▪ Judge the logical consistency of written material<br>▪ Judge the adequacy with which conclusions are supported with data<br>▪ Judge the value of a work or art, music, writing, by using internal criteria or external standards of excellence<br>▪ Generate criteria for evaluation<br>▪ Evaluating one's own products and ideas<br>▪ Form a panel to discuss a topic. State criteria.<br>▪ Write a letter to…advising changes needed. |

# Getting Teachers on Board with Using Rigorous Assignments and Assessments
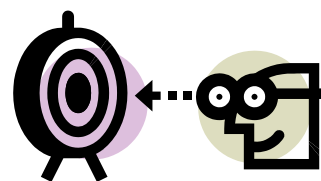
## Assess where you are now.

- To what degree does our staff currently **share a common understanding** of rigorous assignments and assessments in various content areas and an understanding of aligning to standards? What evidence do we have of this common understanding?
- How **often are rigorous assignments and assessments that are well aligned to standards given** in various content areas? What evidence do we have that this is occurring?
- What actions might we take to **build a common understanding of rigorous work** and alignment to standards among our staff members? Who should work together to deepen understandings? When should that work happen? Who should facilitate it?

## Conduct periodic instructional audits.

- Ask each teacher to submit a typical assignments and assessments. Collect examples from different subject areas, different grade levels, and different course levels (college-preparatory, honors, and Advanced Placement, for example).
- Choose a rubric or taxonomy and review the assignments or assessments, rating each for its level of challenge.
- Report the data back to teachers, providing examples of each level.

## Conduct professional development on rubrics or taxonomies for assessing the level of challenge in assignments and assessments. Use the following resources. Provide examples of different levels of assignments and assessments.

- **National Assessment of Educational Progress Rubrics for Basic, Proficient, and Advanced Level Test Items**. For a description of the knowledge and skills students must demonstrate to be at each proficiency level, refer to the 2006 *HSTW* Assessment Report, pages 230-233. For middle grades, refer to the 2006 MMGW Assessment Report, pages A-10 through A-13. Search the National Assessment of Educational Progress site for achievement levels by grade at: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/
- **Bloom's Taxonomy of Objectives**. For expanded use of the taxonomies, see Anderson, L.W., Drathwohl, D.R., et al. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*. New York: Longman. One article that effectively describes this alignment is Moving Toward Cognitive Alignment by George Manthey in the November/December 2005 issue of Leadership.
- ***Designing a New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Robert Marzano**. Corwin Press, 2001. Like Bloom's taxonomy, this taxonomy defines six levels of mental processing: self-system thinking (Level 6); metacognition (Level 5); knowledge utilization (Level 4); analysis (Level 3); comprehension (Level 2); and retrieval (level 1).
- Depth of Knowledge Levels designed by Norman L. Webb, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Webb, N. L. (1999). *Alignment of Science and Mathematics Standards and Assessments in Four States*. Council of Chief State Officers. Washington, DC. The Webb Alignment Tool and its training materials can be accessed on: http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/WAT/index.aspx.

## Design opportunities for teachers to engage in assessing the level of challenge in assignments and assessments on a regular basis.

- **Curriculum design and course syllabus development**. Are we designing instructional activities, assignments, and assessments that require students to work at the proficient level? Do we describe these levels to students and outline them in our course expectations?
- **Reviewing assessment data and looking at student work**. Have students achieved the proficient level on our assignments and assessments? Why or why not? What can we do differently to get more students working at the proficient level?
- **Classroom walk-throughs**. What exists in our classroom learning environments that encourages proficient-level work? Do our learning activities expect students to work at the proficient level? Why or why not? What would we change to encourage more students working at the proficient level?

# Protocols for Looking at Assignments/Assessments/Student Work

| Process Description and Source | Steps/Procedure | When to Use/Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **Looking at Student Work (www.lasw.org)** | | |
| **Tuning Protocol:** A structured process for giving feedback on teacher assignments. Requires a facilitator and timekeeper. Focus questions may be used to target specific kinds of feedback. Developed by Joseph McDonald and David Allen for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. | • Presentation of Work<br>• Clarifying Questions<br>• Reflection Time<br>• Warm Feedback<br>• Cool Feedback<br>• Response from Presenter<br>• Debrief | After the assignment has been completed and student work has been received and scored |
| **Consultancy:** A process whereby a teacher or group of teachers brings a problem, issue or question, reflects on the issue, then listens in on the discussion of other group members. Developed by Daniel Baron. | • A team of observers convenes around the first team while they discuss the development or improvement of an assignment or assessment.<br>• The teams switch places and the second team discusses while the first listens.<br>• The teams switch places again and the first team continues to discuss the assignment or assessment. | At any time—either during the development of an assignment or assessment or after the assignment or assessment is given |
| **Five Whys?** An activity that tries to get behind the thinking or beliefs behind teacher assignments and assessments. The idea is not to debate or challenge the belief, but to get the teacher to think deeply about why the belief is held. | • Begin with a statement.<br>• One member of the team should advocate for this belief statement.<br>• Other members should ask "Why?" five times. For example, begin with, "Why do you believe that . . . ?"<br>• After the advocate responds, ask "Why?" a second time, continuing until he or she has responded five times to the "Why?"<br>• Debrief the experience. | After assignments are given or assessments are used; to reflect on the beliefs underlying practice |
| **Praise – Question – Polish** This format was created by Bill Lyons, a former language arts coordinator from Iowa. It is a good way to scaffold training for novice writers to organize their critiques. | • Abbreviated form of Tuning Protocol where participants:<br>  o Praise the work<br>  o Question specific actions taken<br>  o Polish by offering suggestions for improving the work. | After assignment given and student work received. Good to use with performance assessments and/or tasks. |
| **Standards in Practice:** Structured format that includes teachers working the problem (s) and creating a rubric | • Present the assignment or problem.<br>• Complete the assignment.<br>• Analyze the demands of the assignment.<br>• Identify the standards that apply to the assignment.<br>• Generate a rough rubric or scoring guide for the assignment.<br>• Score the student work using the rubric or scoring guide.<br>• Analyze the student work and plan a strategy for improving students' performance. | Works great with departments at the high school level. |
| **Slice Protocol** | See http://www.turningpts.org/pdf/LASW.pdf | Check a sampling of work. |

# Failure Is Not an Option Resources
## A Selected List

## Books

Blankstein, Alan M. "Failure Is NOT an Option: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools". Corwin Press, 2004.

Du Four, Richard, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek. "Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn". Solution Tree, 2004.

Wormeli, Rick. "Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessment and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom". Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.

## Articles

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Dyrness, Ruth and A. Dyrness.  "Making the Grade in Middle School". Kappa Delta Pi Record, volume 44, issue 3, Spring 2008.

Eubank, Toni. "The Power of "I"" Presentation. www.hstwohioregions.org/sitefiles/Eubank%20-%20Power%20of%20I.ppt

Hartjes, Elena. "Motivating Students". Web interview. http://www.techersatrisk.com/motivating-students/

Kenkel, Sue, S. Hoelscher, and T. West. "Leading Adolescents to Mastery".  Educational Leadership, April 2006.

Lusk, Brittani. "Failure is not an option at Kearns Jr. High" Deseret News, 2006. http://deseretnews.com/article/1,5143,645191475,00.html

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Reeves, Douglas. "Improving Student Attendance". Educational Leadership, May 2008. http://208.112.40.253/resources/custom/articles/May.2008-ImprovingStudentAttendance.pdf

Reeves, Douglas. "The Case Against the Zero".  *Phi Delta Kappan*, volume 86, issue 4, 2004. www.ncpep.org/sail/Case_Against_Zero.pdf

Scriffiny, Patricia L. "Seven Reasons for Standards-based Grading" Educational Leadership, October 2008. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct08/vol66/num02

Trudeau, Michelle. "Students' View of Intelligence Can Help Grades". NPR Morning Edition, 15 February 2007. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7406521

Walker, Karen. "Role of Zero in Grading", Research Brief. Principal's Partnership. 2006. http://www.principalspartnership.com